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UNCLAS ROME 003213

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IT](#) [ITALIAN POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: "BANANA PEEL POLITICS" IN ITALY

REF: ROME 1462

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: IN AN EMBARRASSING, INDELICATE, AND BADLY-TIMED SLIP, INTERIOR MINISTER SCAJOLA SEEMS TO HAVE CALLED THE RECENTLY MURDERED LABOR MINISTRY ADVISER, MARCO BIAGI, ROUGHLY A "PAIN IN THE ASS." THE REACTION WAS VINTAGE ITALIAN POLITICS -- OPPOSITION CALLS FOR HIS  
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PAGE 02 ROME 03213 020647Z  
RESIGNATION AND THREATENED NO-CONFIDENCE VOTES. PM BERLUSCONI REJECTED SCAJOLA'S RESIGNATION, AND WE REMAIN CONFIDENT THIS GOVERNMENT WILL SERVE ITS FIVE-YEAR TERM.  
END SUMMARY.

2. (U) ON JUNE 28, "LA REPUBBLICA", A LEFT-LEANING DAILY, PUBLISHED A SERIES OF LETTERS AND E-MAILS FROM MARCO BIAGI, THE LABOR MINISTRY ADVISER MURDERED MARCH 19 IN BOLOGNA (REF; BIAGI IS WIDELY PRESUMED TO HAVE BEEN MURDERED BY THE "NEW RED BRIGADES"). BIAGI SENT THE COMMUNICATIONS TO PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES PIER FERDINANDO CASINI, THE PREFECT (THE GOI'S LOCAL ADMINISTRATOR, REPORTING TO THE INTERIOR MINISTRY) OF BOLOGNA, A DIRECTOR OF CONFINDUSTRIA (ITALY'S LARGEST INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION), AND LABOR MINISTER MARONI TO REQUEST REINSTATEMENT OF A POLICE ESCORT, SAYING HE WAS IN FEAR OF HIS LIFE. IN LIGHT OF HIS MURDER, HIS CONCERNS TURN OUT TO HAVE BEEN NO EXAGGERATION. IT IS UNCLEAR WHAT PROMPTED "LA REPUBBLICA" TO PRINT THE COMMUNICATIONS AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME; REFERENCE HAS BEEN MADE TO THEIR EXISTENCE IN THE PAST.

3. (U) WHILE IN CYPRUS ON AN OFFICIAL VISIT, ITALY'S INTERIOR MINISTER, CLAUDIO SCAJOLA, WAS ASKED TO COMMENT ON BIAGI'S COMMUNICATIONS. HE WAS QUOTED IN TWO CENTRIST DAILIES, "CORRIERE DELLA SERA" AND "IL SOLE-24 ORE," AS RESPONDING BY CALLING BIAGI SOMETHING ROUGHLY EQUIVALENT TO A "PAIN IN THE ASS," AN EXPRESSION UNCHARACTERISTICALLY VULGAR AND HARSH FOR THE NORMALLY-COMPOSED INTERIOR MINISTER. HE REPORTEDLY ADDED THAT BIAGI ONLY SOUGHT TO GET HIS CONTRACT EXTENDED AND THAT, HAD HE HAD AN ESCORT, THREE PEOPLE WOULD HAVE BEEN KILLED INSTEAD OF ONE. HE HAS SINCE  
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 ROME 03213 020647Z  
SAID THAT HE "DID NOT RECOGNIZE" HIMSELF "IN THE REMARKS ATTRIBUTED" TO HIM, BUT THE PREPONDERANCE OF INFORMATION AVAILABLE SUGGESTS HE DID, INDEED, SAY SOMETHING HE SHOULD NOT HAVE. EVEN HIS FELLOW GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL, LABOR MINISTRY ROBERTO MARONI, URGED SCAJOLA TO APOLOGIZE FOR HIS REMARKS -- AND WAS NOT REBUKED BY PM BERLUSCONI FOR SO DOING.

4. (U) IN THE BROUHAHA FOLLOWING SCAJOLA'S REPORTED REMARKS, THE OPPOSITION UNSURPRISINGLY CALLED FOR HIS RESIGNATION. AFTER CONSULTING WITH DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER FINI, AND PROBABLY OTHER GOVERNMENT MEMBERS AS WELL, BERLUSCONI REJECTED SCAJOLA'S RESIGNATION. THE PRIME MINISTER HAS BEEN CALLED BY THE OPPOSITION TO EXPLAIN HIS DECISION BEFORE PARLIAMENT; HIS APPEARANCE HAS YET TO BE SCHEDULED.

5. (U) AMIDST THE ACCUSATIONS AND COUNTER-ACCUSATIONS, SEVERAL LEADERS, INCLUDING FINI AND CASINI, HAVE TRIED TO CALM TENSIONS AND RECALL THE UNITY OF PURPOSE AGAINST TERRORISM REPORTED REF. FINI EVEN REACHED OUT TO CGIL SECRETARY GENERAL COFFERATTI (THE ONLY UNION WHICH REFUSED

SIPDIS  
TO PARTICIPATE IN TALKS WITH THE GOVERNMENT ON LABOR REFORM), TO WHOM BIAGI REFERRED IN HIS COMMUNICATIONS AS "CONTRIBUTING TO HIS (BIAGI'S) 'CRIMINALIZATION.'" BIAGI HAD WORRIED THAT COFFERATTI'S RHETORIC AGAINST THE REFORMS BIAGI WAS DRAFTING ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT SPARK AN ATTACK. HIS CONCERNS BECAME PUBLIC IN THIS RECENT EPISODE. ACKNOWLEDGING THAT "COFFERRATI IS TO BLAME FOR CAUSING HARSH SOCIAL TENSIONS," FINI ADDED THAT "THIS SHOULD NOT AUTHORIZE ANYONE TO 'CRIMINALIZE' HIM." CASINI CALLED  
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 04 ROME 03213 020647Z  
ON HIS COLLEAGUES TO "STOP USING THESE BARBARIC METHODS OF POLITICAL CONFRONTATION."

6. (SBU) COMMENT: AS RESPECTED COMMENTATOR STEFANO FOLLI

WROTE IN "CORRIERE DELLA SERA," "MINISTER SCAJOLA SLIPPED ON A BANANA PEEL." FOLLI CONTINUED BY SAYING THIS COULD HAVE "DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES" FOR THE GOVERNMENT IF NOT HANDLED PROPERLY. WE THINK THERE IS LITTLE DANGER OF THIS TASTELESS AND ILL-TIMED REMARK BRINGING DOWN THE BERLUSCONI GOVERNMENT; THEY STILL HAVE THE VOTES, EVEN IF THE OPPOSITION CALLS FOR A VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE. WE ARE REMINDED OF THE POLEMICS FOLLOWING LAST JULY'S G-8 SUMMIT AND THE OPPOSITION'S EFFORTS TO BRING DOWN SCAJOLA, AT A MINIMUM, IN THE AFTERMATH OF THAT EPISODE. WE PREDICT THAT, IF ANYTHING, THIS EMBARRASSING AND TACKY EVENT WILL HAVE A POSSIBLY SHORTER SHELF-LIFE. WHETHER ITALY'S PUBLIC REPRESENTATIVES, GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION ALIKE, CAN REGAIN THE HIGH ROAD THEY WALKED FOLLOWING BIAGI'S MURDER IS ANOTHER QUESTION, ESPECIALLY IN THE UPCOMING SUMMER NEWS DOLDRUMS. WE HOPE THEY CAN.  
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